

WATER

and other stories

by

Daron Fraley

INTERNET ARCHIVE EDITION

www.archive.org

* * * * *

PUBLISHED BY:

Daron Fraley on www.archive.org

PETITIONS

Copyright © 2010 by Daron Fraley

ANGEL'S SONG

Copyright © 2010 by Daron Fraley

WATER

Copyright © 2010 by Daron Fraley

This ebook is licensed under a Creative Commons License. You may copy, distribute, and transmit the work under the following conditions:

You must attribute the work to the author, Daron D. Fraley.

You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

For more information about the Creative Commons License, please visit:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0>

For attributions, please reference the following URL of the author: <http://www.daronfraley.com>

* * * * *

For Jennifer

* * * * *

PETITIONS

A contemporary short story

ANGEL’S SONG

A companion short story to the novel “The Thorn” book one of “The Chronicles of Gan”

WATER

Based on the account found in the Gospel of John, chapter 5, verses 1-16, and the painting by Carl Bloch, “Healing at the Pool of Bethesda”

* * * * *

PETITIONS

* * * * *

“**G**et a job!”

Although he had heard the judgmental charge before, Mark winced as the shiny sports car grumbled around the corner and sped down the street. The muggy afternoon pressed heavily on the hand-written cardboard sign—his strength waned, and he let his arm fall to his side, fingers still clutching the tattered brown square. Passing vehicles caused the flimsy sign to flap against his knee.

“I had a job,” he whispered.

The traffic light above him glowed yellow, then red. A wave of air pushed up by braking cars and trucks ruffled the hairs of Mark’s scruffy chin. Heat rising off the hood of the nearest car drifted over him, threatening to choke every ounce of energy from his body. The driver avoided making eye contact, pretending to look at something in the rear-view mirror.

Mark let his gaze drift across the sea of idling vehicles and found disinterested expressions behind every steering wheel. The familiarity of the sight made no impression on him. Stepping back to get some relief from the hot asphalt at the edge of the curb, he stood on a worn patch of grass bordering the sidewalk, his heels thanking him for softer ground.

When the light turned green and the cars went their various ways, exhaust fumes cleared from his sinuses only to be replaced by the scent of his own body. It had been several days since

he had been able to use a truck stop shower. *Hopefully tonight*, he thought.

Mark's stomach rumbled. *Food first, shower second*. He shoved his free hand into a pocket and fingered the two bills. A five and a one, he recalled. Sighing, he lifted his cardboard message higher.

A fresh batch of vehicles had filled the temporary parking lot—models, makes, sizes, and colors all different than before, but the general scene more of the same. Three cars back and next to the sidewalk, a middle-aged man with a bulging belly squeezed out of his seat, stepped onto the concrete, and glared over his shoulder at the woman riding with him. Bent down to peer out the windshield, she impatiently waved him forward. Approaching Mark, he snarled, "Best not buy any booze wit' it."

Without even looking at the money, Mark managed to say, "Thank you," then stuffed the bills into his pocket. It felt like a couple of ones. The man lumbered back to his car and slammed the door just as the light turned.

Job? Booze? It's because of booze that I don't have a job! Angry, Mark barely turned his head as the sedan left. He closed his eyes, refusing to remember. But the memories wouldn't leave. In his mind's eye he could see his office and the massive cherry-wood desk where he would always sit. He remembered the stacks of folders, the brass lamp, and the expensive fountain pen he had gotten as a gift in celebration of his MBA.

He remembered sobbing at that desk. That is where he had gotten the news: The driver fled from the scene, and the car he was driving—stolen. Alcohol was found on the floorboard. Julie and his precious little Madison—gone. The responding firefighters did all they could.

Holding a picture of his family, Mark cried many times at that desk in following days. Prescribed medication didn't help. Although he took time off, whenever he returned to the office he sat in a stupor for hours at a time. At first the company was sympathetic, but days dragged into weeks. They finally let him go. Five months later, he lost everything.

Anger burned hot in Mark's chest as he thought about the alcohol which ruined his life. He had been a casual drinker himself before the accident. *Never. Never again.*

Fighting off images of his wife, he returned to his self-imposed task and tried to endure. Honking. Noxious fumes mixing in the humid September air. Uncounted vehicles carrying indifferent people. Although he didn't have a watch, Mark guessed it must be nearing the end of rush hour. If he wanted to get dinner and make it down to the shelter before dark, he would have to leave soon.

Uncharacteristically hot for the time of year, the day had been miserable. But clouds were gathering, and he could feel a front moving in which would cool things off. That would mean cold, wet nights. Sleeping on the ground would not be pleasant.

Debating if he should leave right then, he looked up to see another car door open. It was a small green compact, fairly new, but an inexpensive model. A woman in the passenger seat looked on with interest as the driver stepped out of the vehicle. He walked towards Mark, a kind expression on his face. The man made eye contact every step of the way. With only a smile, the man pressed a bill into Mark's hand, squeezing it firmly. Then he turned away.

Startled by the compassionate gesture, Mark blurted out a phrase he had heard other homeless people say, "God bless you!" The words fell from his lips awkwardly, but as he heard them, he believed the message. *Yes, God has blessed that man*, Mark thought. As the car pulled away, Mark waved.

He looked down at the money. It was a ten. He looked up again, but the car was gone. Reflecting on the brief meeting, he marveled at the contrast between the last three encounters he

had experienced. Then he realized—the money didn't matter. The kindness of one person had made his day. *But I am still grateful for the gift!* Now he would get dinner *and* a shower.

Almost giddy at the prospect of it, he folded up his worn-out sign, shoved it into his dusty back pocket, and crossed the street. As he walked, thunder sounded in the distance. A breeze kicked up, and tiny droplets started to speckle the sidewalk. But Mark didn't care. His goal now in sight, he hastened into the fast food restaurant, breathing in the inviting smells of a hot meal.

Thankfully, the restaurant had only one other patron ordering. And most of the seats were empty. He pulled all of his cash from his pocket, making sure the cashier saw he had the money to pay. To avoid offending the other patron, Mark kept his distance. When he ordered, he stood back against the rail. Once his tray had been filled, he found a table near the back and faced the window.

Every bite of his sandwich was heaven. Having a front-row seat to see the weather developing made it all the more enjoyable. Mark loved the rain. By the time his tray held nothing but wrappers, huge drops pelted the ground outside. He sipped on his drink, content to watch the storm. After a fifteen-minute downpour, the rain changed from a fierce deluge to a gentle soaking. It appeared by the looks of the sky that the rain would continue for a while. Knowing he would have to walk without an umbrella, Mark lingered at the table.

A young mother nearly stumbled through the entrance as she shepherded her boy out of the rain. She tapped her hair with an open hand to dislodge the droplets clinging to the top of her corn-rows, while keeping her other hand on the boy's shoulder. Before they could even approach the counter, a cashier called to her. Mark watched them, grateful he had missed the drenching.

"May I help you?"

"Mommy, can I get fries?" the boy said, his voice plaintive.

The woman ignored the boy and started to fumble through her purse. Mark took another sip of his drink. The boy wandered over to the counter, just shorter than he, and gripped the edge with both hands, his chin resting on the surface.

"Mommy, can I get fries?" he said, eyes still glued to the colorful placards above him.

The straw in Mark's cup rattled with a slurping noise. He stood and stepped across the aisle over to the soda machine, filling his cup partway with ice. Positioned on a service island, the machine allowed him to easily observe the boy and his mother without bringing attention to himself.

"Aiden," the woman said firmly. "Come back here an' let go of that counter."

Reluctantly, Aiden shuffled back to his mother.

For the first time, Mark noticed what the woman was wearing. She had a silky mauve blouse, a black leather purse, and a wide copper bracelet. Earrings and makeup testified that she had either just come from work, or she had dressed up for this occasion. Her son now tugged at a corner of her blouse, just below a small stain. Mark could hear the coins jingling in her purse as she dug with one hand and transferred her findings to the other.

Single mom. May not even have a job. Mark caught himself. Suddenly embarrassed that he had passed the instant judgment, he looked down. His thumb was dirty. So were his fingers. Pressing the dispenser, he filled his cup to the top. The jangle of money still reached his ears. He popped the lid back into place on his drink, and stepped back to his seat.

Mark didn't mean to stare. But he couldn't help it. The woman was now counting coins which easily fit into her small hand. Her lips pressed together, she breathed in. She smiled down at the boy.

"Just a hamburger this time," she said, her back straight and head high.

“Mommy,” Aiden said softly. “It’s my birt’ day.”

A gut wrenching spasm went through Mark. He envisioned Madison. There would be no more birthdays. His eyes misted.

Without a second thought, Mark stood, leaving his tray and garbage on the table. He shoved his hand into his pocket and found coins. There were bills too. Folding it all together, he tromped over to the woman.

Startled, she took a step back, a hand on her boy.

Mark held her eyes for only a moment, then looked down at his dirty hand. He held the money forward. “For some fries.”

She looked at the money, then at him. A tear trickled down her cheek.

“Thank you, sir,” she said.

He gave a nod. The boy’s eyes were wide, fearful.

Mark stepped around them and hurried for the door, not looking back. Once outside, he lifted his eyes towards heaven, rain spilling down his face.

“Thank you for the shower.”

* * * * *

ANGEL’S SONG

* * * * *

Jacob wheezed as he set his heavy burden next to the waist-high stone fence at the top of the grassy knoll. He glanced behind himself to be sure neither of his dogs had followed. As far as Jacob could tell by squinting, the dark specks he assumed were sheep dogs still slept in the shade of a well. He wiped sweat from his stinging eyes with a sleeve, brushed his nearly ink-black hair out of the way, and glanced upward. A white puff in the summer sky hid the sister-suns from his gaze.

He grabbed up the cloth-covered reed basket and gingerly leaned over the rock fence, then stretched and let go. His mother’s basket dropped but did not topple. He heaved himself to the other side, picked up his burden once again, and started down the the hill. About halfway down, he again noticed the full fury of both Aqua and Azure beating upon his back.

I should have brought a hat.

A bleat from a goat caused Jacob to look eastward across the narrow valley where a few of the animals milled about near a stone hut almost too small to be called a house. The stone structure did not seem to get any bigger once he found himself at the bottom of the valley. He stepped onto a wooden foot-bridge which spanned a mountain stream. Thick planks bounced under his weight. Jacob shifted the bulging basket to his other hand and started up the hillside towards Eder’s home.

He purposefully avoided looking to his right, where a bow-shot away, a burnt-out oak tree stood alone. The dark, leafless remnant was a contrast to forested peaks in the distance. But averting his gaze did not help—once again he experienced the haunting image of fierce lightning and pounding rain. His father, Joshua, and Eder, both sprinted through the field, calling out

loudly, telling him to run. Terrified, Jacob hugged the trunk of the tree. As they approached, Jacob finally let go. A bolt of energy hit the tree and sprang forward, striking the men.

He saw them fall.

Rain mixing with Jacob's frantic tears could not obscure the surprise graven into Joshua's features. Both men lay perfectly still. Fleeing the burning tree, Jacob stumbled. Violent gusts of wind lashed his back with stinging pricks of icy water. He crawled forward, then collapsed onto his father's chest and sobbed.

No matter how many times Jacob had traversed the valley, the blackened oak always reached into his dark memories, taunting him. It had been seven years. Jacob wondered if he would ever be rid of the pain of that night. He squared his shoulders and hastened on.

The goats grazing on the eastern slopes mostly ignored him, but some chewed their grass almost thoughtfully as Jacob passed by. Their heads turned to follow. After passing Eder's well, Jacob shuffled up the dirt path made hard by frequent use.

"Jacob, is that you?" came a voice from within the stone hut.

Amazing. How did he hear me? Jacob hadn't made a sound, or so he thought, and the only window in Eder's home didn't have a clear view of the pathway.

"Yes—Mother sent me to market this morning. Did you know the grapes are turning? I brought you some."

"Wonderful! Please come in."

Jacob turned the door handle and stepped into the dimly lit, but cool, room. He left the door slightly open. The thin beam of light that fell upon Eder's round table swirled with dust. Just the thought of it made Jacob sneeze.

"To health!"

"Thank you, Eder," Jacob said as he pushed the basket to the center of the table. He turned and shut the door. The small home was a single room furnished only with the table and two chairs, a wide stone fireplace, a dry sink, cupboards, and a goose-feather bed in one corner. Eder sat on the edge of the bed with hands clasped in his lap. He looked as if he had been recently napping. Jacob pulled a chair close and sat down.

Eder reached for Jacob's knee, and then fumbled until Jacob moved his hand where the old man could find it. The gray-haired goatherd pulled Jacob closer and patted the top of his hand.

"I am so pleased you came, Jacob! It has been awhile since you have come to visit. Where is your younger brother?"

"Mother sent Micah to check on the flock."

Eder patted Jacob's hand more firmly. With a knowing smile, he said, "I asked your mother to send you in Micah's stead." The old goatherd didn't let go.

Guilt swept through Jacob like a winter blast. *I knew I should have come last week.* He sighed.

"I am fine, Jacob. But I miss our visits."

Eder reached for his walking stick that leaned against the bed, and stood.

Jacob followed him to the table. "I'm sorry. I have been so busy."

"Hmmm. What did you bring?"

Eder was feeling his way into the basket with both hands. He found a cheese wheel and pulled it up to his nose, inhaling deeply.

"Ah! This is a ripe one! Good and strong."

Jacob smiled. "Picked it out myself."

"It will be delicious. May I share lunch?"

“The cheese is yours, but since I thought you might ask me to stay, I packed our lunch separate from what I brought from the market.”

“You are a fine young man, Jacob! Just like your father.”

Eder sat expectantly at the table. Jacob pulled two leather bags from the basket and set them to the side. He described the rest of the items as he placed them carefully on a cupboard above the dry-sink. In addition to the cheese, there were grapes, breads, dried meats, dried fruits, a bag of wheat flour, a flask of oil, and oats—enough to feed the old man for a few days. Eder was particularly excited about three tin containers: salt, sugar, and dried mint leaves.

Jacob tidied the area, filled two fired-clay goblets from a water bucket, grabbed a wooden platter, and sat down. He opened the first bag and placed a chunk of cheese and small sausage on the platter. He watched Eder’s reaction closely as he pulled a small wicker bowl from the second bag. It was brimming over with berries. Eder’s eyelids fluttered over lifeless orbs as the scent of the berries reached him.

“Thank you Jacob, those are my favorite!” He started to reach for the berries, but immediately pulled back, clasping his hands together. “May I pray?”

“Yes, of course.”

Eder thanked their Creator for the bounty. He asked for a blessing to be upon Jacob, Micah, and their mother. The words he chose in closing were heartfelt and touched Jacob deeply. They ate in silence.

When they were done, Eder insisted that they take the chairs outside to sit in the lengthening shade of a birch tree next to the house. They were grateful for a cool mountain breeze flowing down the valley. Eder’s goats still wandered over the grassy hillside.

As they sat there, both quite content from their lunch, Eder began to sing a tune known throughout much of Gideon. He sang about the beauties of mountain flowers, verdant trees, and cold, pure waters. He sang about a king who would come from a far-away land, and a promise of a peace.

Eder’s voice was clear and strong, the notes in perfect pitch. Jacob’s chest tightened as he recognized the melody as one his father would often sing when Jacob was a boy. Jacob turned away from his father’s closest friend and fought back emotion.

When Eder finished, he sat as if in quiet reflection. Jacob was grateful for the silence. He did not comment on Eder’s singing.

“Joshua was a fine singer. He actually helped me to improve my technique. Do you remember your father’s singing?”

Jacob looked down the hillside and his eyes found the burnt-out oak tree. Why he had momentarily associated the charred tree with his father’s talent, Jacob did not know at first. Then it came to him: Years ago, his father had sung to him under that very tree when it cast pleasant shadows over the field on hot summer days. But now it was dead. The giant oak had died with his father. Jacob looked away.

“Jacob? Jacob?”

“Yes?” Jacob replied after some delay.

“I am going away—the day after the crossing of the sister suns.”

Jacob was surprised. “Where are you going?”

“I am going to live in Hasor for a while, but I do not know when I shall return. Would you help me?”

“Help you?”

“Yes, with my herds. I have asked your mother. She consented to let you stay here at my

home. She is proud of the young man you have become.”

Jacob swelled with pride. *Mother considers me a man?* He was only fourteen, but having her confidence meant the world to him. He looked over at Eder, who was smiling.

“Yes! I . . . I . . .” Jacob stumbled over his words.

“Thank you. It is settled, then.”

Almost two weeks later, Jacob sat in the cool of a summer evening. He waved one last time as his mother and little brother, Micah, disappeared over the stone fence at the top of the hill between the two homes. *Yes—I have two homes now*, Jacob thought. *It’s nice that they come to visit me.*

His mind wandered to recent days when he would visit Eder in much the same manner. Jacob missed him. He worried if Eder had arrived in Hasor safely, but dismissed the thought. Jacob remembered the contingent of Gideonite soldiers that had escorted Eder as if he were a king. *Eder the Goatherd: Ambassador and Counselor to the people of Daniel.* The idea warmed Jacob.

As Jacob reflected, he once again heard Eder’s song in his mind. He softly hummed it. The words which came to him spoke of trees and flowers—a perfect description of the beautiful mountain vistas around him. He gazed to the south, admiring the grand peaks of Gideon. A breeze came down the valley, causing the tall grasses near the stream to sway, and he heard a creak from the lone, dead tree as the wind passed through its naked limbs.

He looked. Every other time the tree had come to his attention, Jacob would always look away, unable to regard it. The frightening memory of the lightning strike had been too much to bear. But today, he was strong.

I take care of myself. I have responsibilities. Mother considers me a man now. The uncertainty he had felt on the day Eder left, no longer remained. Once again, the burnt-out oak seemed to call to him, begging him to come and rest by its trunk like he had as a boy.

Jacob retrieved his shepherd’s staff. At an almost leisurely pace, he left Eder’s home and walked toward the tree. He wanted to go. He had put this off for far too long.

When he found the valley floor, he followed the stream until it veered away, then arrived at the tree. Most of the upper trunk was charcoal, except for one spot where it had split. The large fallen branch still lay on the ground and was nearly rotted through. Grasses around the branch were tall, undisturbed by the herd.

Jacob reached. He touched the splintered surface—a dry and rough wound. His fingers traced down the blackened trunk. He glanced down. There, at the base of the tree, was the place where he had sat on that fateful night. He knelt and brushed his hand across the familiar ground. Jacob gazed up at the tree again and rolled off his knees to sit. He closed his eyes and could almost feel the rain, hear the thunder.

“Eder does not blame me for his blindness,” Jacob said to the tree as he peered up at the tallest fingers of wood reaching skyward.

The tree did not answer.

“I realize now I was protected, even though Eder lost his sight, and Father. . .”

Jacob did not complete the thought. He wiped his eyes. Low in the eastern sky, Aqua and Azure were now touching. By morning, their weekly cycle would be complete. Their crossing would mark the Sabbath day. He looked away for a moment, then again checked on their progress.

When the suns finally dipped below the eastern horizon, all the color of a typical evening filled the sky. But then, just as the last beams hurled themselves over the mountains, the heavens brightened.

The light came from the west, just like any other suns-rising Jacob had ever seen. Jacob watched the curious display, his eyes full of wonder. Jade, Ebony and Sienna, the three moons of Gan, all rose, nearly together. The sky was full of light.

Then he heard music. *There was singing!* Accompanied by a glorious, exuberant melody, joyful words echoed through the valley. Jacob could not hear the full message at first, but the feeling which was carried by the parts he did understand stoked a flame within his heart. Leaning forward and looking up, he tried to determine the direction from which the unseen voices came. At that moment, the song from above dramatically increased in volume until, like the unrolling of a scroll, the heavens opened. Jacob saw the angels. The magnificent power of their shining presence, all in shimmering white, caused Jacob to fall onto one elbow. He raised his other hand as if to call to them.

Descending like gliding birds, the angels declared their various messages with boldness: “We bring tidings of great joy! Peace and good will to you! The King has been born! Shepherds awake, and watch, and pray!”

Taught by his mother, Jacob knew that The One Who Would Suffer—the Great King of all the universe—would be born on another world, far away. He marveled at the fact that the angels had come to him, a simple shepherd boy, and shared their wonderful news. Overcome by their beauty and the powerful light which emanated from their beings, he could do no more than watch as they sang praises to their God, lifting their voices again heavenward. Gradually, and still singing, they began to depart.

Unnoticed previously, one angel at the fringe of the multitude caught Jacob’s eye. The angel ascended with the others, but paused and turned, joy in his face. Jacob gasped. His father smiled.

“I love you, Jacob.”

* * *

(“Angel’s Song” is a companion short story to the novel “The Thorn” book one of “The Chronicles of Gan”. For more information, visit <http://www.daronfraley.com/books>, or www.smashwords.com/books/view/21232 where “The Thorn” can be found.)

* * * * *

WATER

* * * * *

Moshe grunted as he rolled the rest of the way onto his already aching side. His breathing labored, he let his head collapse onto a wad of rags which he had brought for a pillow. A sudden sharp pain between his shoulder blades caused him to turn a little further so that his chest almost touched the splintering reed mat beneath him. With his chin propped upon a bony arm, Moshe

peered from under the low hanging frayed edge of a filthy square of cloth. Hung from a frame of lashed sticks, the cloth served as a makeshift tent—a shady covering for which he was grateful. The heat of a late afternoon sun bore down upon the porch beside the pool where he lay.

He licked his cracking lips, reminded of his terrible thirst by gentle ripples upon the surface of the water. No longer hearing splashing, he hoped whoever had been in the pool had left. Perhaps he was even alone. On another day, long ago, such a thought would have caused a flash of wild hope to race through his soul and tickle his heart. Musing about the possibility made his pulse quicken. *No*, he thought. Not this time. He knew better.

When his breathing calmed, he listened more intently. A scrape. A distant moan. A low cough, not far away. All signs that it would do him no good to scoot out to the water's edge.

He swallowed. Glancing sideways at the gourd lying empty, just out of his reach, he muttered a curse beneath his breath. If only he hadn't slipped off his elbow that morning. He had knocked over his water before, but never that early in the day. Squeezing his eyelids tightly closed in an effort to shut out the vision of water, he sighed. It would be several hours before his son would return for him. Shimon never made it back to the pool until after sundown on the Sabbath. And if his son still felt upset, it might be longer than that.

Their argument had been quite heated. Shimon had insisted that Moshe come to synagogue. He resisted—he had to be near the pool. He begged his son to stay with him. Shimon stated quite rudely that he would still continue to bring Moshe to the pool, but he would never again participate in what he called “a foolish superstition”.

One year previous, after they moved to Jerusalem from their home in Joppa, Shimon had brought Moshe to the pool every morning. Two weeks passed without any success. Then on a day when there were not many people on the porches, the water bubbled. With Shimon's quick assistance, Moshe made it into the pool first. But nothing happened. Realizing that the bubbling stopped right before his toes broke the surface, he knew he had barely missed the proper moment. His legs remained lifeless. Moshe left the pool in the same manner in which he entered it—on crutches, his son steadying him. Tears streamed down his cheeks.

Since that day, Moshe had come to the Pool of The House of Mercy as often as he could. But Shimon never participated—he would wander off to the markets or to the Synagogue, or back to his small shop where he sold candles. Moshe didn't understand why his son would not try again. Just once more, Moshe had often begged. The answer was always “No”.

Tired of the anger he had felt towards his inattentive son all morning long, Moshe tried to relax on his back. With his eyes shut and his mouth dry, his mind wandered to thoughts of other waters. He could picture himself standing on the edge of short cliffs overhanging the sea—the wind in his hair and briny air in his nostrils. Below, he could see indigo swirled with evening sky, sometimes clear and yet sometimes impenetrable, and waves sparkling like crystals, tiny flecks of light shimmering like the stars of a cool, fall night. On that cliff, he was a young man. And he was standing. No crutch. No leaning upon a son's arm for support.

Thirty-eight years. The price for greed had been steep. Oh, how he wished he could go back to that time and place. He would choose better. A different choice would mean everything. Sailing in a boat—his boat—would be possible again.

The noise of an approaching crowd lifted him out of his wishful daydream. He arched backwards trying to see who had come, but on account of the shady covering blocking his view, he could only see the sandaled feet of those closest to his resting spot. He listened. Most of the people talked in low voices, and some even whispered. Unable to pick out more than a stray word or two, he could not discern what the conversation was about, but was intrigued by the tone

of the whispers which reached him. Although he could not tell for sure, they sounded disdainful.

Moshe's shoulders cramped. He rolled to his side once again and pushed his body into a better position to observe the chatting arrivals. Now he could see their legs. He tentatively reached forward. Unwilling to let them see into the safety of his makeshift tent, he pulled his hand back from the cloth without lifting it. Still, curiosity drove him downward until his cheek pressed against the reed mat beneath him. The lower vantage point offered a partial view of a man at the edge of the group—sandals, well-worn and dusty from travel, and a coarse woolen robe, clean yet humble. The man's feet shifted, toes pointing in Moshe's direction.

Catching his breath, Moshe twisted onto his back when footsteps approached. The stranger's feet now very near, Moshe watched as the covering lifted. He immediately raised his arm high to protect his eyes from the sunlight which streamed into the tent. Squinting in the bright rays, Moshe could not clearly see the man's face. He wondered who it could be. Murmuring rose into the air from behind the intrusive man, adding to the concern Moshe had felt about previous whisperings. Half expecting some kind verbal censure, a voice of perfect calmness took him by surprise.

"Wilt thou be made whole?" the man asked.

Has this man come to help me into the water? Did Shimon send him? Yes. Shimon must have sent him. But why the question? Shimon would have told him.

"Sir," Moshe began. "I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me."

He strained to lift himself higher, still not able to see the stranger's face. As if sensing Moshe's thoughts and desires, the man stepped to the left, effectively blocking the direct light. When Moshe's eyes adjusted he gaped.

Eyes like the depths of the blue sea, alive and almost sparkling bright, captivating and powerful, mild yet full of majesty—the man's eyes reminded Moshe of pure water and clear sky. He gulped. Was this the Rabbi others had called Master? Moshe did not know the man's name, and yet in his gaze, Moshe felt nothing but tenderness.

"Wilt thou be made whole?" the man asked again.

Moshe trembled. "Yes, Master."

"Moshe: Rise, take up thy bed, and walk."

* * * * *

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daron Fraley was born in Powell, Wyoming, but doesn't consider himself a cowboy. Living in France for a couple of years provided him the opportunity to hone his cooking skills and to become addicted to good food and chocolate. Apart from his loving family, teaching and writing are his two most favorite things in the world. A classic computer geek, he still likes to fish and camp, makes a mean apple or pumpkin pie from scratch, and he once fixed a gas clothes dryer using photocopier parts. With all of his interests in music, art, the sciences, and religion (especially religion), he would have been quite comfortable living during the Renaissance. Having toured chilly castles while in France, he is glad he didn't live during that time.

After ten total years in the wonderful state of Indiana, Daron, his wife Jennifer, and their six

children once again live in the beautiful Rockies, close to friends and family in Utah and Wyoming.

To learn more about the author and his books, visit:

<http://daronfraley.com/books>

<http://twitter.com/DaronFraley>